



Old Time Barnegat Bay DECOY & GUNNING SHOW AWARDS

Awardees are nominated by the public and selected annually by the Decoy Show committee. Award Plaques are on exhibit at the Stanley "Tip" Seaman County Park Community Center. Awardee profiles can be found under the "archives" drop down on the website at www.co.ocean.nj.us/culturalheritage/. Awardees are honored each year at the award ceremony on the Sunday of the show at 3:30 pm.



HURLEY CONKLIN AWARD

Presented to people who have lived in the Barnegat Bay tradition. This award has been named in honor of the last of the great old time Barnegat Bay carvers, Hurley Conklin.
2026: Joan Seibert, Anthony Hillman,
Terry McNulty, Herb Heinrichs

HARRY M. SHOURDS HERITAGE AWARD

The Shourds Heritage Award has been created to honor and promote the legacy of individuals who would qualify for a Hurley Conklin Award but who died before the award was introduced or before they were able to accept the award. The award is named after carver Harry M. Shourds for his contributions as a decoy carver and for carrying on the traditions of decoy carving through the generations.

2026: Hurley Conklin, Harry V. Shourds, Jim Seibert



MICHAEL T. MANGUM HALL OF FAME AWARD

The Michael T. Mangum Hall of Fame Award honors those who have advanced the purpose of the Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show. The award is named after the show founder, longtime show coordinator, and former Ocean County Parks & Recreation Director Michael T. Mangum.

2026: Joe Smith, Stanley H. "Bud" Seaman

Harry V. Shourds (1861–1920)

2026 Heritage Awardee

By Grove Conrad

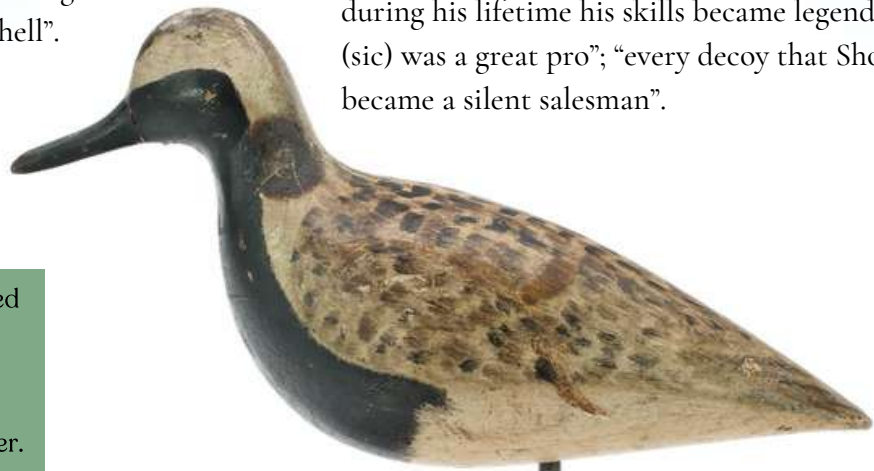
How appropriate that this 2026 Heritage Award be presented to a Shourds during the 250th anniversary of our country's Revolution. During the Revolution, there were approximately 12 Shourds men residing in Tuckerton, among them one Joseph Shourds, a 4th generation Grandfather of honoree Harry Vinuckson Shourds. This Joseph Shourds married Keziah Andrews in 1759 – Miss Andrews was the daughter of Edward Andrews, the man who drove the beavers from Tuckerton Creek and built a dam for his gristmill; today we are presenting this Heritage Award on the shore of that very lake that Harry V. Shourds' 4X maternal grandfather built. As for the Revolution, it is unlikely that any Shourds man fought either as a patriot or a tory – they were Quakers without exception.

How appropriate that this second annual heritage award is awarded to the father of the first heritage awardee! Both son and father were house painters and carpenters respectively. While father Harry passed his heritage (making classic Barnegat Bay decoys) to son Harry M., both are arguably the most recognized decoy makers of all New Jersey generations. Additionally, other family decoy makers that followed both (brother John Shourds, grandsons Alvin Shourds, great-grandsons Ross Shourds and Malcolm Robinson) owe their recognition and abilities to "Nucky" and "Mitchell".



Harry V. Shourds (1861–1920).
Photo courtesy of Ocean County.

How appropriate that despite no mention of Shourds in the first and classic 1935 book of decoy collecting, Joel Barber's "Wild-Fowl Decoys", William Mackey's seminal 1975 book "American Bird Decoys" recognizes Harry V. Shourds and devotes practically an entire chapter describing him as "the greatest professional decoy maker of New Jersey." Never mind that Mr. Mackey misspells Shourds as Shourdes or Shores throughout. Says Mackey: "Even during his lifetime his skills became legend" and "Shourdes (sic) was a great pro"; "every decoy that Shourdes made became a silent salesman".



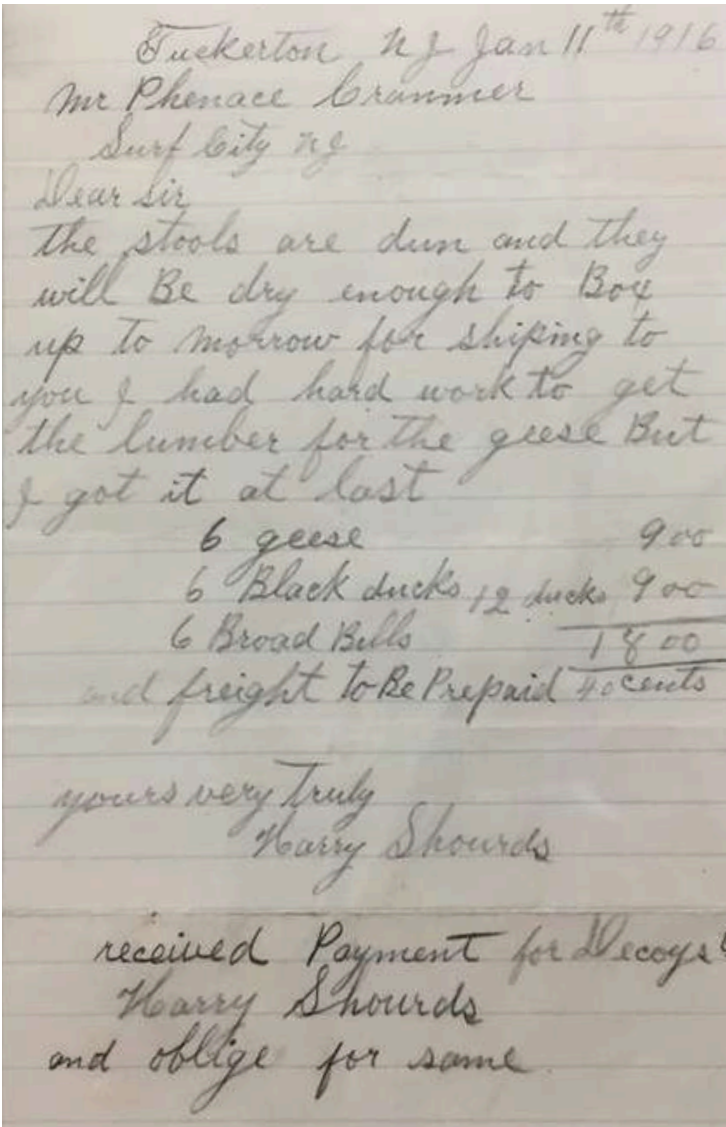
Harry V. Shourds Black Bellied
Plover in summer plumage.
Sold in 2025 at auction for
\$2,400.
Photo Credit: Guyette & Deeter.

How appropriate that Shourds decoys are prized by collectors throughout the United States and the auction houses offering Shourds decoys often “hammer” those birds for six figures, a far cry from Harry’s six dollars a dozen charged at the beginning of the 20th century. Again, to quote from “American Bird Decoys” - “His kind will never appear along the tidewaters of the Atlantic coast and all of us are poorer without him.”

This Heritage award was designed to recognize the legacy of those who would have qualified as a Hurley Conklin finalist had they lived to be so honored. Harry V. Shourds and Harry Mitchell Shourds are a redefinition of all past awards living or otherwise *how appropriate* for the show committee to recognize the greatness embodied in the legacy of these two men.

**Harry V. Shourd Goose sold in 2025
at auction for \$348,000**

Photo credit: Guyette & Deeter



Above photo courtesy of James Allen.

Harry Vicknuckerson Shourds

(1861-1920)

2026 Heritage Awardee



Above photo courtesy of Ocean County.

Harry Mitchell Shourds

(1840-1944)

2025 Heritage Awardee



Above photo courtesy of James Allen.

Harry V. Shourds II

(1930-2017)

1999 Conklin Awardee



Above photo courtesy of Ocean County.

The Late Great Hurley Conklin (1913–1991)

2026 Heritage Awardee

By J.P. Hand

One of the most remarkable characters I've ever met was my friend and mentor, Hurley Conklin. Hurley was one of the last professional decoy makers in the true sense of the word. He carved South Jersey hollow cedar gunning decoys by the dozen beginning sometime after his return from service in WWII. Hurley's decoys with their sleek profiles and stylized paint patterns always stand out in a crowd, despite the lack of much detailed carving. His originality and carving skill is evident in his work, beginning with his early unbranded gunning stools which evolved into his exquisite "shelf ducks" from the 1970s and 80s.



Conklin chopping out a swan. Photo courtesy of J.P. Hand.

Unfortunately, despite all the time I spent with Hurley, I never asked him much about his early carving days. I know that historian and decoy collector Grove Conrad has stated that a carver named Frank Lamson influenced the young Hurley in his decoy-making efforts. Both men lived in the village of Mayetta, (as did other Lamson and Conklin families). When comparing Conklin decoys with those attributed to Lamson, there is no doubt as to that connection. That being said, I see the influence of my all-time favorite carver, Nathan Rowley Horner in Hurley's work. I've often said, "Hurley took up where Rowley left off." While Horner was from Tuckerton, he lived all over Ocean County as an adult; Dover, Long Beach Island, and lastly West Creek (Eagleswood). Hurley grew up in Mayetta just up Rt 9 a few miles. Horner died at around 60 years of age in 1942, and Hurley came home from the War in 1944. If Hurley didn't know him, he surely saw plenty of Rowley's decoys.

As with most "professional" decoy makers, Hurley's style changed over the years. His work can be described

as early (made for gunning only), transitional, and his later refined "shelf ducks" as he liked to call them. In fact, Hurley Conklin was one of the few contemporary carvers who developed their own recognizable style (as did Bob White, George Strunk and Pete Peterson to name a few). The work of Conklin and the others mentioned can be described as a "school": an original style that influenced the work of other carvers in their region.

Years ago, a fellow collector referred to Conklin decoys as "cartoonish", which I believe can be considered a compliment. For centuries, political cartoonists have exaggerated certain characteristics of their subjects making a character easily identifiable without the use of text. Hurley did the same when designing and carving a decoy. His early decoys can be described as handsome, functionable working stools, where his later work, especially his "shelf ducks" can be described as sleek and racy. Over a half a century of carving, Hurley carved most duck and goose and shorebird species found in

South Jersey. During the latter part of his career, he seemed to like carving Red Breasted Mergansers, Hooded Mergansers, Green-winged Teal, Black Ducks, and Brant, as they made up a lot of his production. Gadwalls and Wood Ducks and maybe Mallards by Conklin are especially rare, and not so much, Buffleheads, Blue-winged Teal, and Common Mergansers.

Hurley grew up in the Mayetta/Cedar Run area of Stafford Township, just below Manahawkin. He was one of the eight children of Charles W. Conklin and Kathryn (Katie) Hyde Conklin. Not long after meeting Hurley I asked him what nationality he was and he replied, "I think we're Irish." I wish I knew then what I know now; I'd long suspected that the Ocean County Conklins were descended from the "Conklings" of eastern Long Island, New York.

A couple of hours of research for this bio revealed that the Conklins, or the "Conklings" as the earliest ones spelled it, were in Stafford Township well before the American Revolution. Not long after arriving in Stafford, the folks by the name of Conklin dropped the "G" at the end of their name. It turns out that Hurley, like his great-grandfather Amariah Conklin (born New Jersey 1809), was a descendant of Annanias Conkling who left County Staffordshire, England and landed in Salem, Massachusetts by 1639. That first Conklin in America, along with the Birdsalls, Hands, and Hildreths, was one of the earliest settlers in the whaling village of East Hampton, Long Island (where he died in 1657). The fact that Stafford Township is named for the home county of the earliest Conklin immigrant is one hell of a coincidence.

Hurley might have gotten a kick out of knowing that his ancestors back on Long Island in the 1600s were likely killing ducks (and whales) with the relatives of



Artie Birdsall and myself and probably quite a few other members of the New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association.

By the way, the 1850 Federal Census shows that Hurley's great-grandfather Amariah Conklin couldn't leave his Stafford farm without bumping into a Cranmer, a "Spragg", or a Lamson. The Census records list Hurley, his father Charles, and his grandfather Peter Conklin as "bayman". Commercial clamming seems to be the most common occupation for generations of the Conklin family and their neighbors.



Photo credit: Guyette & Deeter.

Hurley left school after the 6th grade and the 1930 Census lists him as a 17-year-old "Bayman" working in the "seafood industry" with his older brothers, Amos 23, and Alvin 21. He may have started carving decoys a little at this time (I wish I had asked him more about that). Hurley continued to work as a clammer until WWII, during which he served in the U. S. Army for 3 1/2 years in North Africa and France (1941-1944). After the war, Hurley married a girl from up the road in Berkeley Township (Mary E. Johnson). They built a house on Parker Street in Manahawkin where they raised their daughter while Hurley made a living at various pursuits; making decoys, carpentry work, and guiding for the Marsh Elder Gun Club.

Below are some anecdotes of things I know of or that Hurley shared with me. As a carver myself, I've always credited Hurley and Harry Shourds III as being my mentors. The difference between the two; Harry let me watch him, while Hurley took me under his wing.

Hurley told me that one winter (1950s-1960s) he made 95 of his "paddle tail" Canada Geese; that is, chopped, spoke shaved, hollowed & sanded all by hand!

Photo credit: Guyette & Deeter.

He was a true “bayman”, did a little of this, a little of that. One time a man with a heavy German accent came to see him and said he wanted a “cesspool duck”, Hurley replied, “Well, I make black ducks, brant and sheldrakes, but I don’t make any cesspool ducks.” ...It turned out the man wanted a cesspool *dug*.

Decoy dealer, Zeke Zasz of Barnegat (by way of Elizabeth, North Jersey), once told me that he quit buying ducks from Hurley when he raised his price from \$19 to \$21; Hurley told me he ended their working relationship when Zeke tried to pay him for some decoys with a check written out in pencil!

According to Mike Mangum, Hurley set up at table at the first Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show. As far as I know, Hurley only regularly exhibited at one decoy show, the “Quail Hill Inn” show, which was put on by Fred and Ethel Noyes. He only did that show because it was free, and a seafood buffet was served to the exhibitors after the show.

Hurley didn’t put up a fancy display, just a bare table with ducks lined up like cars at an auto dealer. Most of Hurley’s decoys were pre-sold anyway.

Hurley held about the same view regarding decorative carvers as I did back then. One time as exhibitors were setting up at the Quail Hill show, Hurley turned to me and nodded in the direction of someone carrying an armful of burnt-feather ducks with more ribbons than a mummer in a Philly string band and said, “see him carrying all the **** in here, he’ll be carrying it out at the end of the day”. Hurley wasn’t arrogant, but he knew he was good! Hurley loved his little poodle, Pebbles. I don’t remember if it was Pebbles or an earlier dog but

Hurley told me the dog only ever bit one person, decoy collector Russell Holst (Russell had been forewarned not to pet the dog). My wife’s grandfather, John McCann, owned “the shack” and 400 acres on the Wading River and gunned with a dozen of Hurley’s teal. Russell Holtz’s parents were close family friends and after John McCann died, Russell took all but one of the teal off the widow’s hands.

Many veterans don’t like to share their wartime experiences, or in many cases not until their later years. Hurley was different, serving in the U.S. Army in Africa and France in WWII may have been traumatic, but it was the biggest event in his life. He shared with me (and many of you) lots of stories about foxholes in the North African desert and later his time in France spent driving an officer around in a jeep.



Photo credit: Guyette & Deeter.

Hurley was proud of his work as a decoy maker and wasn’t easily impressed with stool by other carvers. I personally watched him take nondescript “clunkers” and re-carve the original heads to make them prettier; today those birds would appear to have been re-headed by Hurley.

The father and son duck hunting team of Dirk Van Nest and Peter Van Nest gunned over more Conklins than anyone I’ve ever met. Pete told me that they had about 60 of Hurley’s broadbills, 36 brant, a small rig of buffleheads and some black ducks. They also had the only rig of Conklin canvasbacks I’ve ever seen. Interestingly, Dirk bought some of the birds unpainted to save money and painted them himself. Years later he took those ones back to Hurley and had him paint them. Some would call those repaints, but in my opinion, they are original; Dirk primed them and



Conklin (L) and J.P. Hand (R). Photo courtesy: J.P. Hand.

Hurley gave them the finish coat, just many years later! I have a pair of those buffleheads, two of my favorites, with the initials VN for “Van Nest” carved under the bills. One time while I was visiting Hurley, he expressed his admiration for carver Gene Hendrickson. I don’t know the connection between them or how Hurley knew him, but Hurley obviously thought a lot of him.

By the time I met Hurley, he had given up gunning for ducks. He told me in his low, slow voice, “I’ve killed enough ducks, I don’t need to kill anymore.” As I approached my 60s, I started to feel the same way. While he didn’t gun anymore, most every day Hurley would leave his house in Manahawkin and drive down to Cedar Run Landing “to see what was there”. I was lucky enough to share that experience with him on quite a few occasions.



Conklin, J.P. Hand, Harry V. Shourds. Photo courtesy: J.P. Hand.